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FORTUNATO, PETER A. The Wind, the Calm. (1974) Directed
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I have too many questions myself about the nature of poetry to say much by way of an introduction to this collection. Somehow in the last couple of years these poems came into being, though the experiences from which they were born have passed and the poems too are perishable. My own faith in poetry and my own doubts about the ultimate value of words are bound up in the transiency of all human experience. Perhaps these poems suffice best as brief illuminations, lightning flares on the rim of night by which we may glimpse, or at least think we glimpse, the substance surrounding us. For me, the prospect of the darkness which intercedes grows increasingly awesome, beautiful, and complex. May the reader make of that ground what he can by the flicker of these poems.

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THE WIND, THE CALM
"

by

Peter A. Fortunato
"

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
1974

Approved by

H. J. Kirby-Smith
Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following
committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The
University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis Adviser W. J. Kirby-Smith

Committee Members W. J. Kirby-Smith

Robert Watson

Hoyd Kruger

20 Nov 1974
Date of Acceptance by Committee

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some of these poems have appeared in the following publications: Coraddi, Epoch, and Greensboro Review.

My thanks to teachers and friends for support and advice. Special thanks to Tom Kirby-Smith for his consideration and help.

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SWIMMING LIMBS

Frost Warning

chill

light cresting

shorter days

leaves ringed

ringing already

with winter's fire

gold, some red

green at the heart

or floating

belly up

charred

in the wind

grass persists

as old men

with start-

ling notions

do

tonight a blank-

et of frost

may

be

more seed

spread

semen

to grow

swimming limbs

Leaving the House Late

A small rain collected
on blossoms and leaves felled
paving our steps
out,

into the damp

Wood-smoke, the smell
of wet become haze
carries us
the news of people inside
near a fire

The sky is fixed,
clouds are sashed

This afternoon will last
so long as rain

can keep us

Tonight is Toward the Moon

Echo back between
far sky
lamp's light
and earth
whole black canvas
taut, smooth
and silvered bright

Our steps in touch
we move too
image-bodies cast aloft
ground recedes

all space

Standing in the swell
the moon's full sight

Near Taughannock Falls, a Landslide

One single spume

recurring

each life

a fleck of foam

White sand spilling

time-wise, for

ever a cascade of salt-

less sea

droplets, grains

Water falling

Pieces

*

The walls of the cleft

river, scoured

decks of shale

Mirror-slick

Casting back

the pool of ripples

sifted waves

Buckling, heaving

rocks

falling like snow

floating

down

*

bark

most

tender demands

to be eaten:

thin branches

stripped-white by deer

strewn

at one spot

other times thick

like the skin of lizards

horned

bone outcroppings

ridged

pressed-sharp

as if caterpillar tread

grew there

wet, dark

reeking fungus

mossy

bark

covers us all

Two Days (10/25, 10/26/73)

we worked

our only news

the threat

wistaria cabled to the trees

two days in woods

grappling vines

the country on alert

elm and rangey pine

cut loose

their chokers, corsets

wilted on the ground

first day unknowing

made love

resting in a clearing

then today

vague sense of peril

cedar pollen

jaundice in the air

resumed our task

made safe

the woods

For the Oak at the Quaker Cemetery

The great oak rots,
half an oak
its waist is thick
as the trunks of four live trees.
For years just this.

Once
ringing its height like a blade
in the midst of tall pine,
mere seedlings,
at the edge of the Friends' graves.
Headstones like granite stubble.
Two thirds, the upper
tree lies near, broken off
and wracked with spikes.
The stumps of branches
lost like children
down through the years.

The dream: It was Oregon.
Across the bridge
someone gave me a logger's ax.
Double bit, and I swung it
deep into the tree.
I worked hard on it,

then realized I was carving
 a totem-animal. Dog without eyes.
 An old man stopped me,
 took the ax from my shoulder.

over the rusty pipe
 thrust into the back
 of the cross beam

near the spot

I rode this far
 for good water.

turning all year
 in the ground
 out here into a rock
 enough filled

and flowing by

stream of algae
 anchored, waving
 on the stone basin floor

It's a mountain
 The water algae goes the south
 of a low galloped tank
 I push it with

Good Water

It says so,
scrawled on a slate slab
over the rusty pipe
thrust into the bank
at the cross roads

Mark the spot

I come this far
for good water

Running all year
in the ground
out here into a rock
trough filled
and flowing by

Streamers of algae
anchored, wavering
on the stone basin floor

It's moonrise
The water slips past the mouth
of a ten gallon tank
I fetch it with

Slow fill, the splash of water
 against the sides
 It's full rising tone

Don't touch a drop
 and get it all home

the small, savage...

bits of carrion

they brought home

a pack of dogs

to feed

amuse

yesterday a rabbit's head

with luck

the smallest pup held on

those wilted ears

about translucent, and milky eyes

as blind as day

all our pets

how

eager for this game

play mice and moles

squirrel-foot

one bird I hid for keeps

put into the hollow trunk

of a living tree

safer there and still
the flight of flesh to wood
they forget,
go off somewhere
to find their fill
a dog's life
---no wild animal
ever died
just old and through

Daily the skies thicken
 this hour
 even as the moon
 is rising
full of dusk;
her hem,
 of mist.

Tonight is five times
the porch grows steady
in the wind.

Thundered clouds
are rent and fray,
 trees creak
 rigged full
 of leaf
and we look out

at sea;
 wait in the airs
 to taste
 the rain.

Sundown (Owl Creek Farm)

Six of us

The two

and the four leggeds

high in a field

let fallow

many seasons, now

with winter's crop

of rare white stalks

The setting sun

just west of here

out shoals of flowing cloud

A crimson tide

when the moon rises

We climbed

The dogs

are made for cold they know

that snow is good to eat

Humans drink the sky like wine

fire, quenched fire

from a skin

Song (Friends and Poetry)

at dusk a cat

stalking

 nine bright points

over mountains

 near the sun

fresh prints up-

 on a wash of blue

sky, ricepaper

a knot of clouds

slackens in the west

 orange twine

looped clear around

back of the moon's pate,

that night a near full

 moon

through clouds

steaming east,

 like seafog risen

tested depths

and illumination

 skull-bone

spinning

 sleep

Letter From Home

Dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

My dear

II

INTERIM

Letter From Home

Dear

I'm totally

alone now

your absence

has chewed its leg free

and lives

a life of its own

but this is not

to say I'm through

with sacrifice

being here

demands survival

a single preoccupation

I pass

the time without you

wordless

and always look away

I limp like the animal who

has fallen prey

to itself

(From London, S.W. 6)

here,

my body is

lean and stiff

as a branch in winter

tentative

like the horse gone lame

must learn a new rhythm

and rock in the arms of

a woman with no name

a sleep

I enter

pierce and

cannot cut

formless

as the dreams

I've had of you and can't

remember

I live my body

as if it were my own,

a bird with

wings of ashes

my faceless cock

without eyes

to see you

dumb mouth

open, hungry

as a reed is

to be the flute

that plays your song

to take your breath

or learn gills

like a fish in water

the still water

of death

and birth

where we swam

so blind

and helpless

I have dreamt you
wounded

you asleep
in waves
in whorls
a light mute sheet of wood

a rifle cracks outside
& many times

you split
before me
from my hands
are given

flutter up
are given
plummage dark
and swallow's tail
aloft
takes form

have dreamt you still unharmed

and wincing,
you are given

Interim

I I took a tool
and could not fill
the voice of ageless wood
with the resonance
in my hands

my life was a blade singing rust...

my mouth was stuffed with gold
like the corpse of a king
who bears his wealth dumbly
to the grave

II the potter's ritual

his love, his labor
daily

the clay

he raises from the earth
with his two hands
and fashions on a wheel
turning perfect
circles

III every door
is an arc of flesh
hewn from a tree
opened
or closed
knife,
first tooth:
the vessel I fill
the house I cannot build

atmosphere

snow expected

by afternoon

something thin,
whipping, cold

clouds mass like continents
drifting through each other
forcing out

the sea

the sky roves into open places

high

in the branches of spruce and jackpine

cool greens and blue

hues of the past

no east, no west

ghosts of things, the will

gone

from height like this

a fall is clean

so sure

you want it

First Snow

The night, the snow
fall

quiet years
sift through the mind

Now I am older
many times

I watch the sky
sound my depth
a single
bated wing
so much, a leaden quill

Plume of snow
upon the dark

Sometimes

You sleep
on your side
a corner
that has closed,
vacated itself.
I fix myself
against you
like a handbill
slapped flat by wind.
If I wait inside your need
I will have a place
to fill.

Like Diamonds

Inside the house

inside

the cold

we could not move

the distances

inside the mind

Sun coming dim

through clouds

Sky belly full

curve

Press

and years compress

between the walls

like diamonds

Sunday, Late October

Long days like pale ships
stitched into drydock,

trembling with the tide
stirring weightless
tethered in the bay

Once time
gathers

its hind-quarters
up
and wobbles
like the ewe-necked pony
in his stall

a spasm
in the eye

Till the doctor comes

Salty, white-capped

His hands are hardened
from the running ropes

They stretch the darkness down

There is sometimes a shudder
deep, like a tremor of earth
narrow, as the beam of light
beneath the world
a spine of lightning
caught between skies
eating its way
out by night.

And my doubts crackle all
around me, snakes
in a fire
my neurons dangling
from above, uprooted,
writhing like whips.

But the missed heartbeat,
the pulse asleep,
what is this bracelet of fear:
only the thump
of dust limping home...
and a tree of light
shaken loose from Heaven,
the fallen timber
at rest,
is blessed ore within the planet.

late winter - 1912

and little gone

already - 1912

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

Winter's shadow

and little gone

and little gone

III

SILVER EYE

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

and little gone

Late Winter

already

come

and little gone

Winter's shadow

long enough to reach

past spring

shifting, cagey

Might even double back

These last, a pack of thin days

run together

before the sun

---a tuesday

walked south hill

foot at a time

bright, warmer

along the road, glazed with gravel

like spongey reefs

snow is melting

under a sea

tufts of clouds tufted

sky

Late winter
covered days

Long, slow work
slipping back into

the Dreams Till
Put down like prints in the snow

Vanish

and in that place
open first
rich black drops of earth

Winter-Sleep: Snow Again on April 6

a current

we could not conceive
the body drifts
in its own
waters

an ice-flow

pull,

pulse

the breath
of winter
fills the sleeping woman
already muffled
with snow

she is dreaming
of the lover
burning in her veins

the down of her pillow
rolls in waves
over her rest

she will drown
before she finds him

and escape

death

with each awakening

winter rolling

in its ashes

ready to fill the sky

with smoke again

Anatomy of the Road

East

and South

the path

we follow

tunnels through all night

squeaking below our stiff tires

on the cold asphalt,

radar patrolled.

Towards Jersey trucks

begin to group

stopping

roadsides: the hulls of ships

or whales washed ashore

The bodies freeze

and crack in the midnight sun

far south as Little America,

the Bay of Whales

Everywhere moving elsewhere;

with others, holding the cat,
I am cargo the cat is
a tiny vessel of breath.

His skeletal hold,
the basket of ribs,
carries the fruit of each new life

The stomach, the liver, the heart;
his lungs are two glass bottles
and there is a ship inside each one

In his sleep
the cat's cranium bobs
at sea.
The tenth, tiniest planet
rests before it ascends

Cetus somewhere overhead
perhaps on the other side of the sky

Naming parts, navigating

"the stars 'll get you there"

The soft white letters

never arrive.

Song (Night, Home)

First stars in the just-dark sky
Blue, light at the furthest edge
In a while the moonrise
up behind the woods
Silent timbers
Night breeds in the phloem
And then the last of summer stars
Shifting bodies far away
leave their tracing blank
when winter
Huddle in the house
Peer out the open door
Taillights blinking vague roadway

Crossing Mountains (the Pyrenees)

rock-cut mould
of the ancients

the hooded crags
silent as priests
amidst their breviary

a book of stone
and the hollows like mouths
filled with the smoke
of a foreign tongue

on the lesser slopes
a flock of houses vanishes
caught in the swell
of ground fog,

a cloud at the tip
of a granite finger

the cliffs oblivious,
their centuries of grace
crumbling at ease

when you pass
through the mountain
the threads of your clothes glow
like the seams of the sun

gateless

gate

water passing

opens the grain

it pleases

trickling through

a glove for the hand

shape of the touch

green and deft

a circumstance

fingers sprout

steeped long in earth

the body's oldest

wavering chords

like rain

the deep, quick day

veering from curve

along curve

to the hips of all things

this instant of passage

Gesture

Caught near the wane
grey light of morning
by the kitchen window
Rainy, half-past eight
with cups of coffee
and the crowded table
faintly smelling paint remover
Damp stole in from outside
Behind the glass,
the rutted soggy driveway

No work today
the ground's too wet
(call it a 'soaker'
once inside your shoe)
Boots waiting by the door
Dry cracked leather,
one toe busted open

We were talking
which books to read
and how to,
meanwhile spend the time
responsible for ourselves

Spring Song (One)

first quickening sign

a tumid sky, the

steady drip

like a mare's milk-bag dropped

filled and soon

waxing at the nipples

just before parturition

"breaking water"

that water like this falling

bears a world

into a world

and this spring

begin so many

all born

end to end

the stalks of rain

stand over each other

in shadow-pools

here
by running water

the heart might
make itself visible

leap like a fish
inside the belly
of a larger fish

the visible blend

(ripple

light in waves

on waves

this is not what we see

(or it is)

but a silver skin

(ripple

over muscle

the heart, a great muscle

beating

at a depth of several thousand feet

in an ocean

where fish are translucent

let light through

as love warms us

before we see it

in air

To Kali

finished with the stone, bamboo

a slivered moon

her chimes

the rattle of the wind

our skulls

forever sand

and blowing sand

Lady, flay the air

and music hums

inside our skin

the space is huge

around

our fate,

in rings

a rippled pool, your

iris

lynx

your track is in our grain

The Wind, the Calm

All day the wind
Unfurls the trees.
Fresh leaves appear at our feet
like photographs developed
as they surface in a pan.

The rumpled air,
silk-grey with running
threads of green.

The grass is woven to the earth,
a damask spread.

It does not move:
the ripple is the mind,
the wind, the calm.

Near dark it stops, things clear.
Steel-blue clouds bulge
in the far off sky
huge and silent as ships
in ocean harbors.

From a bridge above the gorge
two bats flicker at eye level,
roll in the high still air.

And a moon just old enough
gathers all our empty forms.

In the Clear After

in the clear after-
noon air

high in the room
locked away
like I always think

'a garret' must mean:

I guard this time,
sky in the window
and leaves trembling outside
top of the tree
captures sun
the most

I can say
what we wanted
was there

and is your sigh,
the touch
and tender impress
that bears our image

At Night, Myself

Moon, like the peak of an iceberg
seen from above,
drifting a tidal pelt of snow
across the planet.
Cloud banks, swell of sky-ocean
dark as the far side of the sun.
The earth, this one breast,
is never visible to us
from below.

Tonight the mind falls back into
itself, packed dense as a dwarf star
gathering everything around.
At last its own light
drawn through the silver eye.